

Under His Wings.

'He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust. (Psalms 91: 4.)

Covered with feathers of mercy,
Covered with feathers of love,
Covered from all that might harm me,
Safe till God calls me above.

Under his wings am I trusting,
Under his wings do I hide;
Safe in this beautiful shadow
Let me forever abide.

Here is my refuge and cover,
Under the wings of my God;
Here am I perfectly resting,
Trusting his love and his rod.

Under the wings of his healing,
Under the wings of his might,
Keep me forever, dear Savior,
Sheltered by day and by night.

—SELECTED.

The Moonlight Ride.

Dr. Talmage's Sermon Preached March 17, 1889.

'Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.' Neh. 2: 15.

A DEAD city is more suggestive than a living city—past Rome than present Rome—ruins rather than newly frescoed cathedral. But the best time to visit a ruin is by moonlight. The Coliseum is far more fascinating to the traveler after sundown than before. You may stand by daylight amid the monastic ruins of Melrose Abbey, and study shafted oriel, and rosetted stone and mullion, but they throw their strongest witchery by moonlight. Some of you remember what the enchanter of Scotland said in the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel':

Wouldst thou view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moonlight.

Washington Irving describes the Andalusian moonlight upon the Alhambra ruins as amounting to an enchantment. My text presents you

JERUSALEM IN RUINS.

The tower down. The gates down. The walls down. Everything down. Nehemiah on horseback, by moonlight looking upon the ruins. While he rides, there are some friends on foot going with him, for they do not want the many horses to disturb the suspicions of the people. These people do not know the secret of Nehemiah's heart, but they are going as a sort of body-guard. I hear the clicking hoofs of the horse on which Nehemiah rides, as he guides it this way and that, into this gate and out of that, winding through that gate amid the debris of great Jerusalem. Now the horse comes to a dead halt at the tumbled masonry where he cannot pass. Now he shies off at the charred timbers. Now he comes along where the water under the moonlight flashes from the mouth of the dragon after which the gate was named.

Heavy hearted Nehemiah! Riding in and out, now by his old home desolated, now by the defaced temple, now amid the scars of the city that had gone down under battering-ram and conflagration. The escorting party knows not what Nehemiah means. Is he getting crazy? Have his own personal sorrows, added to the sorrows of the nation, unbalanced his intellect?

THE MIDNIGHT EXPLORATION

goes on. Nehemiah on horseback rides through the Fish gate, by the tower of the furnaces, by the King's pool, by the Dragon well, in and out, in and out, until the midnight ride is completed, and Nehemiah dismounts from his horse, and to the amazed and confounded and incredulous body-guard, declared the dead secret of his heart when he says, 'Come let us build Jerusalem.' 'What, Nehemiah, have you any money?' 'No.' 'Have you any kingly authority?' 'No.' 'Have you any eloquence?' 'No.' Yet that midnight moonlight ride of Nehemiah resulted in the glorious rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. The people knew not how the thing was to be done, but with great enthusiasm they cried out, 'Let us rise up and build the city!' Some people laughed, and said it could not be done. Some people were infuriate, and offered physical violence, saying the thing should not be done. But the workmen went right on, standing on the wall, trowel in one hand, sworn in the other, until the work was gloriously completed. At that very time, in Greece, Xenophon was writing a history, and Plato was making philosophy, and Demosthenes

was rattling his rhetorical thunder, but all of them together did not do as much for the world as this midnight moonlight ride of praying, courageous, homesick, closemouthed Nehemiah.

My subject first impresses me with the idea what an intense thing is

CHURCH AFFECTION.

Seize the bridle of that horse and stop Nehemiah. Why are you risking your life here in the night? Your horse will stumble over these ruins and fall on you. Stop this useless exposure of your life. No; Nehemiah will not stop. He at last tells us the whole story. He lets us know the exile in a far distant land, and he was a servant, a cup-bearer in the palace of Artaxerxes Longimanus, and one day, while he was handing the cup of wine to the King, the King said to him, 'What is the matter with you? You are not sick. I know you must have some great trouble. What is the matter with you?' Then he told the King how that beloved Jerusalem was broken down; how that his father's tomb had been desecrated; how that

THE TEMPLE HAD BEEN DISHONORED

and defaced; how that the walls were scattered broken. 'Well,' says King Artaxerxes, 'what do you want?' 'Well,' said the cup-bearer Nehemiah, 'I want to go home. I want to fix up the grave of my father. I want to restore the beauty of the temple. I want to rebuild the masonry of the city wall. Besides, I want passports, so that I shall not be hindered in my journey. And besides that,' as you will find in the context, 'I want an order on the man who keeps your forest for just so much timber as I may need for the rebuilding of the city.' 'How long shall you be gone?' said the King. The time of absence is arranged. In hot haste this seeming adventurer comes to Jerusalem and in my text we find him on horseback in the midnight, riding around the ruins. It is through the spectacles of this scene that we discover the ardent attachment of Nehemiah for sacred Jerusalem, which in all ages has been the type of the Church of God, our Jerusalem, which we love just as much as Nehemiah loved his Jerusalem. The fact is that

YOU LOVE THE CHURCH

of God so much that there is no spot on earth so sacred, unless it is your own fireside. The Church has been to you so much comfort and illumination that there is nothing that makes you so irate as to have it talked against. If there have been times when you have been carried into captivity by sickness, you longed for the Church, our holy Jerusalem, just as much as Nehemiah longed for his Jerusalem, and the first day you came out you came to the house of the Lord. When the Temple was in ruins, as ours was years ago, like Nehemiah you walked around and looked at it, and in the moonlight you stood listening if you could not hear the voice of the dead organ, the psalm of the expired Sabbaths.

What Jerusalem was to Nehemiah, the Church of God is to you. Skeptics and infidels may scoff at the Church as an obsolete affair, as a relic of the dark ages, as a convention of goody-goody people, but all the impression they have ever made on your mind against the Church of God is absolutely nothing. You would make more sacrifices for it today than for any other institution, and if it were needed you would die in its defence. You can take the words of the kingly poet as he said, 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.' You understand in your own experience the pathos, the homesickness, the courage, the holy enthusiasm of Nehemiah in his midnight ride around the ruins of his beloved Jerusalem.

Again, my text impresses me with the fact that before reconstruction there must be an exploration of ruins. Why was not Nehemiah asleep under the covers? Why was not his horse stabled in the midnight? Let the police of the city arrest this midnight rider out on some mischief. No. Nehemiah is going to rebuild the city, and he is making preliminary exploration.

In this gate, out that gate, east, west, north, south. All through the ruins. The ruins must be explored before the work of reconstruction can begin. The reason that so many people in this

day, apparently converted, do not stay converted is because they did not explore the ruins of their own heart. The reason there are so many professed Christians who in this day lie and forge and steal and commit adultery and go to the penitentiary, is because they first do not learn the ruin of their own heart. They have not found out that 'the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.' They had an idea that they were almost right, and they built religion as a sort of extension as an ornamental cupola. There was a superstructure of religion built on a substratum of sins.

The trouble with a good deal of modern theology is that instead of building on the right foundation, it builds on the debris of an unregenerated nature. They attempt to rebuild Jerusalem before, in the midnight of conviction, they have seen the ghastliness of the ruin. They have such a poor foundation for their religion that the first northeast storm of temptation blows them down. I have no faith in a man's conversion if he is not converted in

THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

—John Bunyan's way, John Wesley's way, John Calvin's way, Paul's way, Christ's way, God's way. A dentist once said to me, 'Does that hurt?' Said I, 'Of course it hurts! It is in your business as in my profession: we have to hurt before we can help.' You will never understand redemption until you understand ruin. A man tells me that some one is a member of the Church. It makes no impression on my mind at all. I simply want to know whether he was converted in the old-fashioned way or whether he was converted in the new-fashioned way. If he was converted in the old-fashioned way, he will stand. If he was converted in the new-fashioned way, he will not stand. That is all there is about it.

A man comes to me to talk about religion. The first question I ask him is, 'Do you feel yourself to be a sinner?' If he say, 'Well, I—yes,' the hesitancy makes me feel that that man wants a ride on Nehemiah's horse by midnight through the ruins—in by the gate of his affections, out by the gate of his will; and before he has got through with that midnight ride he will drop the reins on the horse's neck, and will take his right hand and smite on his heart and say: 'God be merciful to me a sinner;' and before he has stabled his horse he will take his feet out of the stirrups, and he will slide down on the ground, and he will kneel, crying 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sins are ever before thee.' Ah, my friends, you see this is

NOT A COMPLIMENTARY GOSPEL.

That is what makes some people so mad. It comes to a man of a million dollars and impenitent in his sins and says, 'You're a pauper.' It comes to a woman of fairest cheek, who has never repented, and says, 'You're a sinner.' It comes to a man priding himself on his independence and says, 'You're bound hand and foot by the devil.' It comes to our entire race and says, 'You're a ruin, a ghastly ruin, an illimitable ruin.' Satan sometimes says to me, 'Why do you preach that truth? Why don't you preach a Gospel with no repentance in it? Why don't you flatter men's hearts so that you make them feel all right? Why don't you preach humanitarian Gospel with no repentance in it, saying nothing about the ruin, talking all the time about redemption?' I say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' I would rather lead five souls the right way than twenty thousand the wrong way. The redemption of the Gospel is a perfect farce if there is no ruin. 'The whole need not a physician, but they are sick.' 'If any one, though he be an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel than this,' says the apostle, 'let him be accursed.' There must be the midnight ride over the ruins before Jerusalem can be built. There must be the clicking of the hoofs before there can be the ringing of the trowels.

Again: My subject gives me a specimen of busy and

TRIUMPHANT SADNESS.

If there was any man in the world who had a right to moan and give up everything as lost, it was